New Jersey Youth Advisory Network – *Theory of Change*

PROBLEM - Young people served by the DCF system have limited accessibility to participate in improving the system and developing leadership and advocacy skills.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Youth can make meaningful contributions to improving services and the DCF system
- Being involved in change-making is a powerful developmental process for youth
- Agency and system level efforts to support youth leadership and participation must be engaging and culturally and developmentally relatable
- Modeling of changes in practice and policy by DCF is a key factor in motiving agencies to make practice and policy change

CONTEXT

- Previous DCF efforts at engaging a broad base of youth to participate in leadership and advocacy efforts has been challenging.
- Lack of strong formal processes and structure has not yet been established to lift up important youth issues.

STRATEGIES

1 - DCF and Provider agencies work together in partnership to design, build, evaluate and strengthen a process for improving young people's participation and leadership development system wide.

2 - DCF funded agencies and their staff strengthen opportunities for young people to gain leadership and participate in decision-making and evaluation of supports, services and practices the agency offers.

Regional leads in each of four regions will:

- Train provider staff in youth leadership and advocacy development and youth participation concepts and methods
- Provide tools, materials, and evidence to encourage and support partners to make program, practice, or policy changes that strengthen youth leadership and participation in service improvements.
- Provide ongoing coaching to providers on implementing these program, practice, and policy changes

3 - Young people served by DCF and its contracted providers regularly provide feedback and identify issues and solutions to challenges youth face.

Regional leads in each of four regions will:

- Assist selected (all) providers to prepare and support youth to participate in sharing learnings at quarterly meetings and other opportunities, as appropriate.
- Organize an engaging process in which youth and staff reps from provider agencies systematically present issues, critically reflect on issues, and develop recommendations for priority issues that youth are raising.

RESULTS

Youth...

- Are engaged in community or program change effort that impacts the DCF system

Agencies & their staff are...

- Increasing capacity, confidence and commitment to youth engagement in program, practice, and policy change
- Making system, policy, budget and practice changes that demonstrate youth engagement

DCF is...

- Enacting policy, practice, budget or policy change to increase QUALITY and FREQUENCY of youth involvement
- Enacting policy, practice, budget, or policy change to improve youth outcomes as a result of increase in youth participation